

Recollections of a Superspy

THE SERVICE

The Memoirs of General Reinhard Gehlen
World. 386 pp. \$10.00

THE GENERAL WAS A SPY

By Heinz Höhne and Hermann Zolling
Coward, McCann and Geoghegan. 347 pp. \$10.00

GEHLEN, SPY OF THE CENTURY

The Truth About General Gehlen and His Spy Ring

By E. H. Cookridge
Random House. 402 pp. \$10.00

By SANCHE DE GRAMONT

OF THESE THREE BOOKS, the most disappointing is the one by Gehlen himself. His memoirs make up in self-justification what they lack in candor. It is only natural for the head of an intelligence agency to gloss over its shortcomings and stress its achievements. It is also a habit of the intelligence community to make statements without backing them up. The reader, like the successive West German chancellors who employed General Gehlen, must take on faith the oracular words based on "top-secret sources" that emanate from the "old man in the crypt."

Thus we are told, in the book's one startling disclosure, that Martin Bormann, Hitler's personal secretary, was a Soviet agent who made his way to Russia at the end of the war and died there some years later. Since this version is at variance with others, it should be buttressed with facts. Instead, Gehlen asks us to believe that he received "conclusive proof" in "two separate reports from behind the Iron Curtain." The memoirs are full of sibylline phrases like "I am not permitted to disclose." Reading them is like watching a *Dance of the Seven Veils* in which the veils do not drop; tantalizing perhaps, but unsatisfactory.

We must turn to the books by Cookridge and the two *Der Spiegel* reporters, Heinz Höhne and Hermann Zolling, to gain some understanding of the legendary figure of cold-war espionage. Both books are solidly researched and crowded with information. Cookridge is more complete on Gehlen's wartime activities as head of Foreign Armies East, the German army's intelligence branch on the Eastern front.

He also has a grudging admiration, which I find difficult to share, "for the single-mindedness and shrewdness of this grey, secret man behind the scenes, whose motive force was his almost paranoid hatred of Communism." Höhne and Zolling are much more thorough on the years of Gehlen's decline, the last five years, which in Gehlen's 400-page memoirs are dealt with in a fast 22 pages. They seem to have had access to the files of Gehlen's successors, which allows them to offer the best inside view of an intelligence agency I have ever read.

What emerges from these books is the portrait of a hero of our times, who was not so much a patriot as a company man. He was not loyal to a country or a government, but to an organization, which he considered his personal property, and he adopted the ideology most suitable to the maintenance of his organization, a crusading anti-Communism.

Between 1942 and 1945, he so accurately reported on Russian military operations that Hitler fired him in a rage: He could have obtained no higher references. He microfilmed his department's files, buried them in the Bavarian mountains, and calmly awaited the arrival of the Americans. He had foreseen that the American alliance with the Soviet Union would develop into a cold war, and he was able to offer a useful commodity, the only intelligence files that had steadily built up information about the Russians. When he turned himself in, he reached a "gentlemen's agreement" with the head of G-2, General Edwin Sibert, that he would operate a clandestine German intelligence organization funded by G-2. Three years later, in 1949, he was transferred to CIA control.

It was not until 1956 that the Gehlen Org was placed under German control and became the Federal Republic's official Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst, or BND). Since the Gehlen organization was an orphan, passed on from one foster home to another, it needed to find acceptance in German political circles, and did favors for those in power. Gehlen formed a special bureau to feed information to Adenauer, who began to refer to him in cabinet meetings as "my dear general." He conducted surveillance of the most trivial sort on other German politicians, such as reporting the number of whiskies Willy Brandt ordered at the Hotel Bristol while on a visit to Paris.

Spying on other Germans was not part of Gehlen's mandate to collect intelligence on Eastern Europe. However, he scored some notable successes in his chosen field, such as obtaining the text of the 20th Communist Party Congress secret speech, in which Khrushchev denounced Stalin, and planting agents at high levels of the East German regime. But far from restricting himself to Eastern Europe, Gehlen meddled in many other areas of the world, like a management consultant ready to accept contracts from any client, even those in direct competition. Thus, he supplied agents to train the Egyptian secret service against the Israelis, at the same time that he was assisting secret operations by Israeli agents on Arab territory. This is sometimes called working both sides of the street. It paid off, for one of Gehlen's great feats was predicting the exact date of the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, at a time when the American ambassador in Tel Aviv was reporting that everything was normal.

Closer to home, Gehlen was faulted for failing to predict the building of the Berlin wall (although the BND did give warning that a total shutdown of East Berlin was forthcoming) and for packing his organization with former SS and Gestapo men and with his own relatives. Höhne and Zolling estimate the total of SS and Gestapo veterans in the BND at between 23 and 30 per cent, and the number of Gehlen's relatives in senior BND posts at sixteen, including his brother, who as the BND man in Rome, was famous for having twice wrongly predicted the outcome of a papal election.

2

In the Sixties, the Gehlen organization was shaken by two crises that crippled its effectiveness. In 1961 it was discovered that Heinz Felsche, for years the head of the BND Soviet espionage section, and Gehlen's fair-haired boy, responsible for a number of espionage coups, was working for the Russians. Over a period of ten years, this German Philby had fed the Russians more than 15,000 microfilmed documents from the Gehlen files and betrayed close to 100 agents working in East Germany and other Eastern bloc countries. The damage done by Felsche was followed by

"What emerges from these books is the portrait of a hero of our times, who was not so much a patriot as a company man . . ."

the *Spiegel* affair, in which Gehlen was accused of feeding the German newsmagazine classified information to discredit Adenauer's defense minister, Franz Josef Strauss. Adenauer was so furious he wanted to have Gehlen arrested.

Gehlen did not find much sympathy among Adenauer's successors. One of Ludwig Erhardt's first decisions was to evict from the chancellery the small BND liaison staff, with the words: "I will not live under the same roof with these people." In 1968, Gehlen retired and was succeeded by one of his assistants, Gerhard Wessel. Chancellor Kiesinger ordered three senior civil servants to conduct an inquiry into the BND. Their report described mismanagement, nepotism, and defective leadership, and summed up that the BND was "a corrupt institution." The ultimate merit of these books, including Gehlen's memoirs, is that they raise the question whether a 20th-century parliamentary democracy can tolerate a Gehlen-style cloak-and-dagger espionage network, with its attendant sins of partisan reporting and political snooping. Perhaps intelligence is too important a matter to be left to spies.

SANCHE DE GRIMONT, a former New York Herald Tribune correspondent, is the author of *The French: Portrait of a People*, *Lives to Give*, and a forthcoming novel, *The Way Up*.



Photos from "The Service"

Gen. Gehlen reviews troops of the Russian
Liberation Army during World War II.



Reinhard Gehlen, after his retirement in 1968